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ABSTRACT

Language experience in adult basic education serves a variety of purposes: emphasizing communication, providing an atmosphere of sharing and personal growth, and most importantly, allowing students to confront their own learning blocks rather than ignoring them. Case histories support the fulfillment of those purposes. There are basic methods to help the teacher use language experience and integrate it into an on-going adult reading program. The methods used at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, Mass. are: dictation, transcription, directed writing, and free writing. Each method has certain advantages and disadvantages, and these are explained. The center places emphasis on student-created materials. They can be used to develop skill in sight vocabulary, phonic analysis, structural analysis, and comprehension. Specific steps a teacher can employ in the use of student-created materials are presented in a case-study format. The document's appendix, "Some Writing Ideas," presents several themes that were used to initiate writing exercises, explains the classroom context in which they were used, provides examples, and comments on some of the outcomes. (AG)

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A GUIDE TO USING LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE WITH ADULTS

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WHY LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

Sometimes at night,when the hours get near bedtime, as I get dressed for bed (not really wanting to go to bed, but my body feeling tired), I must lie down so that I can get some rest.

Sometimes, seeing my husband so restless, I wonder why he is so restless. He must have something on his mind or his nerves are so bad that he cannot sleep. Sometimes, I tell him that I'm not sleepy, but most of the time he wants me to lie down with him. It will make him feel better. And when I do lie down, as I lie in my bed, I begin to think about life itself and what is happening. And then I look out of my window, look at the light and the sky and everything in it, saying, what's up there? And then I think about death and life.

You know, sometimes you can get pretty frightened, especially in the middle of the night, lying there when everyone is asleep, and you look out the window, wondering about your bills and everything else you can think of, the problems of the world and all the people around you. Some lady said that she believed the world was coming to an end because of all the people and things getting killed.

In a reading class based upon the Language Experience Approach, the curriculum consists of the articulated experiences, thoughts and feelings of the students. The first words that are learned are those of the students themselves. Words become something useful, personal and exciting; they tell about our lives and how we feel when we fall asleep at night. They belong to all of us, not just to teachers and authors. They are symbols of sounds and images rather than conglomerates of phonetic parts.

Language Experience allows students and teachers to place the primary emphasis in class on communication and self expression rather than on phonics. The skill of decoding words is not considered a goal in itself, but only a means of communication. This sounds somewhat simplistic and obvious since that is clearly what language is all about. But too often in reading classes, the mastery of initial consonants becomes more important than the story one student might write for another. Language Experience simply keeps in the forefront of the students' minds what this struggle is all for. Phonics is not neglected -- it is an integral part of the Language Experience class. The first words a student tells to the teacher are broken down and studied in terms of their phonetic parts. The difference is that the words are not the often boring, impersonal BAT, CAT, RAT of a phonics workbook; they are words that have organic meaning for the student.

One of the most exciting things about a Language Experience class is the atmosphere of sharing and personal growth. The process of telling stories and articulating thought encourages students to be active, creative participants in the class. They are there not only to learn reading from a teacher, but to give to and learn from each other. They share the reassurance and support so needed by adult learners; and they discover that they are not alone in their feelings of failure and

frustration about learning. Students learn to feel self-respect and pride in the face of a learning task which has previously made them feel passive and ashamed.

The adult learner approaches reading with a whole history of negative school experiences, feelings of failure, and emotional blocks to learning. Language Experience provides a process which allows students to deal with these problems head on. First of all the student is presented with a new way of learning to read, dissimilar to the grammar school reading classes and phonics workbooks that brought failure before. The unfamiliarity of the method itself encourages hope. In addition, the method builds on the student's feelings of confidence and self-respect by treating the student as a person with ideas worthy of being communicated and preserved in writing. The informal, personal atmosphere of the Language Experience classroom allows the student to relax; it lessens the intense pressure to perform and allows the learning process to flow more easily. But most important of all, Language Experience allows students to confront their own learning blocks rather than to ignore them. Instead of pretending that students have no difficulties with learning, the teacher can encourage the exploration of these difficulties through discussions, dictated stories of early school memories, free associations of feelings about reading, etc. Many

students have told us that after talking or writing about their feelings of failure and frustration about reading, these feelings were considerably lessened. This is the single most important experience that Language Experience provides for the adult learner.

One of our students, Stevie, had a serious reading disability. He had spent eight years in Special Classes and when he came to the Learning Center, he could not even read words on a first grade level. Whenever Stevie read, his body muscles tensed up, his breathing became shallow and his voice was tight and gagged. His word retention was poor, and he consistently misread easy words that he had just learned. It was obvious that Stevie's tension and anxiety were preventing him from taking in the words in front of him. He was fighting off the words and the teachers who had previously persisted in trying to push learning down his throat. Another approach was needed to help Stevie relax enough to let the words come in and learning take place. Slowly through talking and dictating Language Experience stories, Stevie explored his feelings about reading. He talked about feeling dumb and being afraid that his girlfriend would find out that he couldn't read. One day he was particularly depressed and anxious and could not concentrate. The teacher took out some index cards and wrote down:

I	AM		.

She asked Stevie to dictate some words to finish the sentence. He produced the following words: SLOW, DISTURBED, NUTS, CRAZY, PSYCHO, STUPID and RETARDED. The teacher was awed by this outpouring of pain and felt that these feelings should be dealt with in some way. But when Stevie was finished with dictating, reading and arranging these words in sentences, he appeared visibly relieved and more relaxed. The process of exploring and sharing his pain allowed him to leave it behind and move on with his reading. When he left he asked the teacher to keep the cards (instead of destroying them) but not to show them to anyone. He showed his trust of the teacher, as well as his acknowlegement that the words he left with her symbolized a deeply personal, tender part of him. The teacher's use of writing to help Stevie with his anxiety encouraged in him this feeling of respect and personal connection with words.

Language Experience materials created by students reflect this growth and exploration that is a part of every class. Below are two reading passages --the first from an Adult Literacy Reader published by a commercial publishing company; the second, from The Changing of the Times, a collection of writings put together by students at the Community Learning

Center.

> Jack Black works in a factory. Many men work in this factory. It is a big glass factory...Jack has just started his job. Jack has just started working in the factory. His job is to fill boxes with glass. Jimmy Linn works at the glass factory. Jack works with Jimmy...Jack and Jimmy are happy at the factory. The other men are happy at the factory.
>
> City Living, Laubach and Kirk, The New Streamlined English Series, Macmillan Co.,1967.

> Sometimes I feel that my life has no meaning. I get up in the morning, get dressed and go to work. And when I get done, I go back home. Sometimes when I get home Carla will meet me at the door---she would say, "Hi, Mom!". With Carla, sometimes that's not enough for me. One of these days I would like to be by myself. Don't misunderstand, I love Bill, I love Carla, but I feel lonely at times. There must be something that I can get interested in, so that my life can be more meaningful. Could it be that I am searching for something no man can give me?
>
> Azalene Dunn, The Changing of the Times.

The impact of Azalene's story in comparison with the published passage is obvious. By their nature, students' own writings provide original, compelling readings that are directly related to people's lives in a way that published materials can never be. They can provide as well the vocabulary and skill development that are the focus of published literacy

readings. Let's look at the two passages above. Since the appeal of the first one is clearly not its interesting content, it must have other values as a beginning reading passage. It has short, simple sentences with a limited, controlled vocabulary and consistent repetition of words and phrases. It focuses on the short vowel sounds (especially ă and ĭ) and contains no dipthongs or digraphs. The second passage, however, also has many of these advantages. Although it is not controlled for dipthongs, digraphs and long vowel sounds, the vocabulary is simple and phonetic. (The only really difficult words in the passage are "enough", "meaning", and "searching".) The sentences are not complicated and there is a great deal of repetition,("Sometimes" and "Something", "I get up","I get dressed", "I get done", "I get home", "I love Bill", "I love Carla".) While it is not so controlled for vocabulary as the first passage, it has many possible uses for the teaching of skills (Long Vowel Sounds: time, life, like, home, lone, Short Vowel Sounds: at,that, and, back, man, can, has, etc.); and it is simple enough to be used for a beginning reader. Most important of all, what it loses in controlled vocabulary, it more than makes up for in content.

We have had a great deal of success using student created materials at the Community Learning Center. Our

two collections, The Changing of the Times and Sometimes I Talk With Myself, have stimulated pride and an interest in reading on the part of our students. They also make up for the almost total lack of good, commercially available, beginning reading materials for adults. They provide readings with simple vocabulary and sentence structure which still appeal to the adult reader's mature interests and experiences. And they provide a forum for adult learners to explore, often for the first time, the harmonies and contradictions, beauties and pains of their own and other people's lives.

WAYS TO HELP STUDENTS CREATE THEIR OWN CURRICULUM

To proscribe a rigid methodology for using Language Experience would conflict with its underlying philosophy. There are, however, certain basic methods which will help the teacher begin to use Language Experience and to integrate it into an on-going adult reading program. At the Community Learning Center, we use four different methods: 1. Dictation, 2. Transcription, 3. Directed Writing, and 4. Free Writing. Dictation and Transcription utilize students' oral language skills; Directed and Free Writing their written skills.

1. The Dictation Method.

> One Saturday night, Solomon, and I and W.C., we went to Porter, Georgia, to the movie. We saw a Western. After we came home, me and W.C., we got our guns and started to playing cowboys. My mother was working. She sent me and W.C. to the house to get water. Instead we got our toy guns. We decided we wanted to do something big which was holding up the bus. We saw the bus coming. We figured out how to stop it, which was laying down in the road.
>
> After the bus stopped, W.C. told the driver, "Get your hands up." Then I told him if he knows what's good for him he would do what the man told him. He put us on the bus and took us where our mother was. Mama told us she was tired and didn't feel like running. She sent Sonny Boy to get six switches. She sat down and plaited them together. She put three into one, when she hit you one lick, she hit you three times. And all during the whipping she was telling us how wrong we were. And we were telling her we were not going to do it any

more.

> That one whipping taught me wrong don't pay. Then we decided not to be crooks. Instead we still gave Mama a hard time.

The student dictates a short passage such as the one above (a personal memory, a daily activity, a movie plot), which the teacher prints word-for-word with a magic marker on a large sheet of paper. The teacher reads the story back to the student, pointing to each word, while the student repeats. From the beginning, the teacher should sound out words while reading, even if the student does not yet know the letter sounds.

With the teacher giving encouragement and help on difficult words, the student then reads through the story by him/herself. Next, the teacher points randomly to words in the passage to make sure that the student is building a sight vocabulary and not just memorizing the spoken words. Particularly difficult or meaningful words from the story can be printed in large letters on 3x5 index cards. These flash cards give the student practice in recognizing his or her own words out of context. They are the first entries in an individualized card-file library of sight words and can be taken home for further review.

At the next session, using a typed version of the student's story, the student and teacher repeat many of the first

lesson's activities; they read and repeat, point randomly to individual words, and review flash cards. The teacher can also introduce phonic word attack skills and linguistic patterns based on words from the student's own story.

The dictation method can be used with small groups as well as with individual students. When there is a small group, each student dictates a sentence or two for a group story, which the teacher prints in large letters on the blackboard. This is typed up and handed out at the next class meeting. For the entire story to be meaningful to each student in the class, it should involve a shared group experience; such as telling about a person, place, or incident familiar to all, or describing a picture or object in the classroom.

Advantages of the Dictation Method.

The student has immediate success with the Dictation Method, since his or her initial encounter with reading depends on the recall of words just-spoken. Saying words, then immediately reading them, links oral language with written symbols. This process helps to alleviate much of the fear and distrust of the printed word experienced by so many adult non-readers. From the first day, the student discovers that written words can be as intimate and informal as spoken words. Reading comprehension ceases to be a distant goal because students begin by reading words they value and understand.

By basing phonic drills and memorization of sight words on this meaningful vocabulary, students never lose sight of the ultimate goal of reading--communicating about oneself and learning about others.

Disadvantages of the Dictation Method.

Because this method involves long-hand dictation, the student must often speak at a slower than normal rate, or else repeat parts of his story, so that the teacher can write down each word. This method requires the teacher to be firmly grounded in teaching and sequencing reading skills. He or she must also be willing to type up student stories and adapt traditional drills and exercises to student-written materials.

2. The Transcription Method.

As in the Dictation Method, the student, or group of students, tells a story from personal experience. Instead of immediately writing, the teacher tape records the story and later transcribes it, either in part or in total. The tape can be played back right away and/or replayed during the next class session, depending on how strong a link the teacher wants between the spoken and the written word. Once the material is typed, the student and teacher can use it for all of the sight vocabulary and phonic skill development ac-

tivities described under the Dictation Method.

The Transcription Method often captures many unexpected stories and reminiscences inspired by group discussions. A tape recorder can be switched on at any moment to preserve something important, funny, or profound that a student is saying. The story shown below, "The Communion" was spontaneously recorded by a student during a class. Her easy, amusing style and obvious delight in sharing her experience with others comes across well in the transcribed version.

THE COMMUNION

My son's mother-in-law's mother--my daughter-in-law's grandmother--died. We went to the church for the funeral, a Catholic church. We stayed in the church. Then it was time for the Communion. We have a different Communion in our church. Here they gave you a little thing like a candy--a little round thing that the Priest puts in your mouth. It's a wafer.

Anyway, everybody was going to take Communion. We didn't know what to do. I said: "Well, let's go. It doesn't hurt anything. It's Communion. What's the difference?"

My brother, Jimmy, and I were there. My brother was a little bit shy. He didn't know what to do--whether to go or not. I said: "It's nothing. It's no sin." My daughter-in-law and her parents were wondering what we were going to do. Were we going to go? to feel embarassed?

We got up and took a turn. But the Priest asked my brother something and he had to answer something before he took the Communion. My brother didn't understand and couldn't speak well, but he went up just the same. He wanted to do it like everybody else. The Priest was supposed to

ask us something before he gave us the wafer. He asked my brother a question--I don't remember what. Maybe it was something like: "Do you want to take this?" He asked everybody, even the Catholic people.

My brother didn't know what to answer because he can't understand or speak English very well, but he opened his mouth and said: "I don't know, I'm Greek." The Priest took out the wafer!

Jimmy did the same thing. He said to the Priest: "I'm Greek, too, Father." And the Priest didn't give him anything. Then I went and I opened my mouth. The Priest said something to me, but I was so fast that he had no chance to take the wafer out of my mouth!

My daughter-in-law was so embarassed. "What will my mother-in-law and father-in-law do now? What are they going to do?" She felt guilty because she hadn't explained things to us. When you take Communion you have to answer something. We didn't know. My brother just said: "I'm Greek."

Advantages of the Transcription Method.

Since emphasis is placed on speaking before reading, Transcription is particularly good in English-as-a-Second Language reading classes. Vocabulary is naturally controlled; the student learns to read only those words which he/she can use orally.

The Transcription Method is also good for group work--discussions, projects, and questionnaire answers can all be recorded. Each person contributes and the material produced is often more spontaneous and natural than with the Dictation Method. Warm, supportive feelings often develop when

a group works to create its own reading materials. These materials are as varied and rich as the group itself: funny and sad, intimate and surprising, profound and important.

Disadvantages of the Transcription Method.

Because the student does not see each word taking form in print as he/she says it, this method does not provide the same spoken-written reinforcement as the Dictation Method. Tape transcription takes a great deal of the teacher's time. Questions about editing the taped material also arise: how much and what to include? should dialect differences or English-as-a-Second Language "mistakes" be changed or transcribed verbatim? These are not insurmountable problems, but rather interesting, important issues for teachers to confront.

3. The Directed Writing Method.

In the Directed Writing Method, the focus begins to change from reading to writing. This method often employs in-class group writing: questionnaires, group dialogues, and plays. Starting from highly structured, one word responses to their own questions or to one word fill-in-the-blank exercises, students gradually increase the amount of writing they do. Below are some examples of sentence-completion exercises using adjectives related to feelings.

Although students only add one or two words to "standardized" sentences, their finished products are very diverse and personal.

1. When I think of my children, I feel happy and worried.
2. When I think of my country, I feel sad.
3. When I think of my house, I feel warm.
4. When I think of green, I feel quiet and calm.
5. When I think of red, I feel silly and angry.
6. When I think of Saturday night, I feel relaxed.
7. When I think of Friday afternoon, I feel relieved and tired.
8. When I think of Monday morning, I feel terrible.
9. When I think of death, I feel afraid and alone.
10. When I think of life, I feel happy, sad, afraid, and eager.

In sentence-completion activities, students copy sentences which they already read and finish them by choosing one or two words from a list or from memory. Even the most insecure beginning writer feels comfortable copying a sentence and adding words he/she already knows.

When students feel secure copying and completing sentences, they can move on to exercises which are less tightly controlled, but which still provide direction and focused skill practice. "Questions and Answers" is one such exercise. Each student writes a question on a sheet of paper. Suggestions can be give, or students can write whatever they want

to ask each other: "What's your name?"; "Do you like Boston?"; What's your favorite T.V. program?" When each person has written a question, the papers are passed to the right, so that each person now has a new sheet of paper with his neighbor's question. Each student now answers this new question, writes another question, and passes the paper to the right. Questions and answers are read aloud and can be typed up for future exercises. Students can copy over these questions and answers, work with flash cards of difficult vocabulary, take dictation, practice spelling or structural patterns. Here are some questions and answers from one of our reading classes.

Q. Do you like to sing? Do you sing to your little girl?
A. Yes, I like to sing. Sometimes I sing Gospel songs to my little girl.

Q. What is your favorite T.V. program?
A. "Medical Center."

Q. If you were stranded on a desert island with two men, who would you like them to be?
A. Tommie and Guy Williams.

Q. Do you dream? Do you have good or bad dreams?
A. I have bad and good. Last night I dreamt my daughter got shot.

Advantages of the Directed Writing Method.

Directed Writing can be structured to develop specific writing skills or practice narrowly defined syntactic pat-

terns, spelling rules, etc. This method also takes some pressure off students by focussing not simply on the mechanics of writing, but also on self-expression and interesting material. Students practice writing within a meaningful context; disconnected, irrelevent skill development drills are avoided.

Disadvantages of the Directed Writing Method.

A wide range of writing abilities within one class sometimes makes Directed Writing difficult. Students also often have trouble reading each other's handwriting, so sharing of the finished product has to wait until the teacher has compiled and typed up all the material. This can become constructive, however, since the immediate need to have students read each other's writing provides good, natural motivation for work on handwriting skills.

As with all student-generated material, the teacher must deal with questions of style and personal expression: "What and how much should I 'correct'?"; "How can I correct spelling, syntax, and sentence structure while still allowing for personal differences in style and expression?"; "Do I deal with individual writing problems as they arise, or do I look for areas of general difficulty and concentrate on those?"

4. The Free Writing Method.

EVERYTHING BUT THE RIGHT THING

> Fanny Carpet was our teacher. She was the fourth grade teacher and our class was in her room. She used to bring collard greens, cornbread, hamhocks, blackeyed peas and a big jar of buttermilk for lunch. She was a big woman--she was a high yeller. She would give us some food to eat. She wasn't bad but you better not do anything wrong. My friend Eula Mae, her mother would bake white biscuits and she would bring them with peanut butter for lunch.
>
> Wiggin and Paul used to bring big buckets of food for lunch--ham meat, and rice and biscuits. They used to hide their lunches underneath the school house. One day my husband saw them put them there, and he ate them all up. Then he put dirt in the bucket and Wiggin caught him. He dragged him out to the charcoal pile and beat him with charcoal.

Each student, working individually, writes about a personal or a shared group experience. Either students choose the topic, such as "School Memories" as they did when "Everything but the Right Thing" was written, or the teacher chooses one designed to practice a specific skill. Students write during class and are encouraged to ask each other or the teacher for help on spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. Sometimes students read their own work aloud at the end of class; often the teacher types and edites the writing for the next class meeting. Students then read and discuss each other's work.

Advantages of the Free Writing Method.

Free Writing has both psychological and pedigogical

advantages. It allows each student an opportunity for personal expression within a supportive group framework. Disturbing problems or issues of concern flow from student writing and can often be resolved, either by the act of self-expression itself, or by sharing them with others--joy and good times are shared as well. Specific skill practice can be built into these individual writing exercises; writing about childhood memories practices the past tense, describing holiday customs in a foreign country encourages logical sequencing of ideas and clear explanations.

Sharing each other's writing gives students new and interesting perspectives, as well as new vocabulary and word patterns. Each person in the class is the expert when others read his/her work. Students look to the author instead of to the teacher for help with vocabulary and for sounding out words, fostering a spirit of self-respect and group collaboration. Knowing that your writing is enjoyed by others and is helping them learn to read is a powerful source of motivation and pleasure.

Disadvantages of the Free Writing Method.

It is difficult for the teacher to correct student writing on the spot, and time-consuming out of class. Some students want and need a great deal of help and support when they write on their own. This makes large classes un-

wieldy and often necessitates two teachers or a teacher and an aide. Peer group help often solves this problem, however, and it grows very naturally out of Language Experience methods.

Using Language Experience to teach reading and writing to adults asks more of the teacher than traditional workbook methods: more time, more energy, more imagination. It requires that the teacher have a firm grasp of phonic skills and sequencing, since no workbook or manual can be followed entirely. Language Experience asks more of students also. It asks them to actively participate, to share responsibility with the teacher, and to open up channels of communication too long ignored in school. But the rewards are enormous, not only in the development of concrete reading and writing skills, but also in personal growth and self-awareness.

Instead of struggling through lists of disconnected phonic pattern drills, instead of memorizing the consonant doubling rule for its own sake, instead of keeping "reading and writing what I want" some distant, unattainable goal, students express valuable feelings and thoughts now as the core of learning to read and write.

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE AND SPECIFIC READING SKILLS

How do Language Experience and other reading approaches complement one another? How can a teacher already using phonics workbooks and published reading materials begin to use Language Experience methods? This section demonstrates how student-created materials can be used for skill development in 1. Sight Vocabulary, 2. Phonic Analysis, 3. Structural Analysis, and 4. Comprehension. Here are some notes on possible ways to proceed. Once teachers begin to tap student resources, new and better possibilities will unfold; responsibility, creativity, learning, and joy are all shared.

1. Sight Words and Language Experience.

> I came in an airplane. I came to work. When I got to the airport, I called my cousin and he took me to the apartment. When I came I had never seen the snow before. It was January. I thought the snow was beautiful. The first day I felt terrible because my family was not here.
>
> I CAME WORK COUSIN SNOW FELT
>
> BEAUTIFUL AIRPLANE TERRIBLE FAMILY

These words are charged with emotional significance for Julia. They are special; she wanted to remember and recognize them. These were the first words in Julia's own personal sight vocabulary.

First Julia heard and repeated these words in the context of her story. She could recall the story almost word-for-word after she dictated it and could read it successfully. Some people might argue that this is not really reading, but only memorizing--like the child who "reads" her favorite storybook without a mistake, holding it upside down. Such objections not only ignore the importance of guaranteeing a non-reader immediate successes, they also negate the place of visual memory among the decoding skills.

When Julia could recognize and read her sight words in context, I then pointed to them at random. Next, I printed them on index cards for her to study. Finally she could read her words in other contexts--first in her own story with words and sentences rearranged, then a story she had never seen or heard before.

Gradually Julia became familiar with a variety of letters and words. Once she developed an intimacy with her own special words, she could take them apart into sounds and syllables, then reconstruct them. She learned that printed words could be manipulated and controlled as easily as spoken words. She can now transfer this active control of her own sight vocabulary to other less familiar words and sentences.

2. Phonic Analysis and Language Experience.

MY WIFE

I met my wife in the subway because we both worked in Boston. Every morning we took the same train. I saw her every time and we talked. That's how we met.

The first time I met her I introduced myself to her. For three months after that, I never saw her again. I knew what time she always took the train, but when I came at the same time to talk to her, she was never there.

After three months, I met her one morning and asked her: "What happened to you? I have been coming early for a long time. I lose several minutes waiting for you because I want to see you."

She said: "Well, I have been sick. I have been in the hospital." She had an operation. That's why she never went to work.

O.K. Now I started to talk to her about how I felt towards her. In the mornings I tried to meet her. I gave her my phone number and she gave me her phone number. Now we talked often on the phone. But she never told me what she thought about me. I told her that I loved her. She didn't say anything.

She was married before and she got divorced. She told me that she was afraid of men because her husband was not too good for her. I tried to let her know that everybody is not the same way. Sometimes it's good to take a chance.

One day I told her: "I want to go to your house to visit you." She said yes. Now I went to her house and we had the chance to talk. We talked and we talked and we talked.

She said: "Well, maybe." She said: "Well, I'm going to see what I can do. Maybe next week I will tell you if I can say yes, O.K.?"

I still called her, talked to her, and I met her in the subway. We talked all the time. One day she accepted my offer. That's all. Right now we are married. We were married ten months ago on March 10, 1972.

I'm not sorry, because she's a good lady---and
I'm a good man, too.

Francis, a wonderful raconteur, recorded this story on tape. He was eager to see the typed version--surprised, proud, and delighted that his personal experiences were worthy of print. He particularly enjoyed the last several sentences, and chuckled appreciatively every time we read them.

We used words from the last sentence as the basis for phonic exercises contrasting the vowel digraph oo as in too with oo as in good. First, I pointed to the word good. I sounded out each letter as I repeated the word several times. I then printed G O O D in large letters on a sheet of paper. Underneath it, I printed W O O D. I repeated the word several times and asked Francis to sound it out. Underneath these two words I printed other words which fit into the O O D pattern. Francis sounded these out without any trouble. He soon recognized similar phonic patterns in other one-syllable word families, such as took, book, look. Next the process was repeated for too and other rhyming words.

Words chosen to show the oo vowel digraph patterns were already familiar to Francis. Many came from the story, "My Wife", or other stories he had dictated. Finally, Francis could look at new words, remember the oo digraph patterns, and sound them out correctly. We reread "My Wife" and other stories he could read, underlining words with oo. Finally, Francis

copied the list of oo words and made flash cards for himself. He took these home to study, along with the story to proudly read his wife.

3. Structural Analysis and Language Experience.

The following student-written letter, sent to the complaint column of a local newspaper, served as the basis for structural analysis of the prefix un-.

Dear Joe:

> My landlord does not fix the toilet and the wash bowl. It is very unhealthy. The hot water faucet does not work. This is since June. I am very unhappy. Please, can you help me? Thank you.

First, Saincienne read her letter to the class. We went through it together several times, making sure that each student understood the vocabulary and syntax. Next, I printed

H A P P Y UN H A P P Y in large letters

H E A L T H Y UN H E A L T H Y

on the blackboard. We talked about the meaning contrasts and then students thought of all the words they knew beginning with un-. These I printed in columns on the blackboard:

UNEMPLOYED	UNWELL	UNTIE
UNMARRIED	UNFRIENDLY	UNDRESS
UNKIND		UNDO
UNNECESSARY		UNWRAP
		UNABLE

For the next class meeting I typed up a workbook-inspired

written exercise using the students' list of words. I was anxious that students get controlled practice in reading and writing words beginning with the prefix un-. Each student worked individually and was to choose the "appropriate word" from a list at the bottom of the exercise. Here are a few examples of the sentences we worked on.

1. John doesn't have a wife. He is _____.
   (unmarried)
2. I don't like some people because they are _____ and _____.
   (unfriendly and unkind)
3. If you take off your clothes, you will be _____.
   (undressed)

It didn't occur to me that there were more than one or two "appropriate" answers until one 70 year-old man in the class winked at me merrily and read: "If you take off your clothes, you will be unemployed."

The class exploded into laughter. Students abandonned their "correct answers" and vied with one another to produce unexpected sentences. The class came alive, as students used new words, asked each other for help with spelling, and laughed appreciatively at each other's inventiveness. Some favorites were:

1. If you take off your clothes, you will be unkind, uninteresting, unbelievable, unfortunate, unusual.
2. John doesn't have a wife. He is unbelievable, unwell, unreal, unhealthy, unfortunate.

4. Comprehension Skills and Language Experience.

Comprehension and critical reading need not remain far-off goals, even in a beginning reading class. Language Experience starts from comprehension rather than leaving it for "advanced" skill work. From their first day in a reading class, students can start to develop sophisticated critical and interpretive reading skills.

The following paragraphs were transcribed from a class discussion of birth customs in different countries. These and other excerpts from the same discussion were used as the focus for an exercise on connectives, contextual clues, and sequencing of ideas.

DIFFERENT CUSTOMS WHEN A BABY IS BORN

Cuba: When a child is going to be born in Cuba, we make a fruit liquor. If I am pregnant one or two months, my mother makes a big pot of syrup, with sugar, water, and all kinds of fruit. We put it away inside a dark room. When the baby is born, we open it and the visitors drink the liquor. The father gives cigars to the men.

Portugal: In Portugal, when the mother is pregnant, she makes clothes for the baby. After about four or five months, she stops making clothes. After the baby is born, friends give the mother fruit and eggs. The mother gives the baby her milk. It's better to breast-feed the baby. The baby gets more love. It's good.

I handed out the transcription at the class meeting following the tape-recorded discussion. Students read their own

contributions aloud and answered each other's questions. Then I distributed strips of paper and asked each student to copy over his/her paragraph--one sentence on each strip. I scrambled the strips for one paragraph and then reconstructed them in their original order to demonstrate sequencing of ideas.

First students scrambled and reordered their own paragraphs. Then they exchanged sentence strips and recreated each other's paragraphs, sentence by sentence. Some people worked as a team, using each other as resource persons; others worked individually, checking their version with the typed transcription.

We continued to exchange sentence strips until each student had worked with every paragraph. Finally, as a group, we explored some of the interesting, novel changes that could be made by changing sentence order. We also discussed which sequence changes would greatly affect the meaning, which would not. By such exercises as this one, students begin to realize that written words are not necessarily unchangable symbols, but useful and managable tools of expression; they have already mastered important critical and interpretive reading skills.

We would enjoy talking with people who are interested in finding new ways to use Language Experience in adult reading classes. This guide is just a beginning. We hope to experiment and expand our ideas during the next year.

APPENDIX: SOME WRITING IDEAS

LIES

We found that this was a good game to use near the beginning of a class to help students and teachers get to know each other. We asked the members of the class, students and teachers, to write down five statements about themselves. At least one or more of the statements had to be lies. When everyone was ready, the statements were passed to and read out loud by the person on the left. Then the class discussed and tried to guess which of the statements were true or false. These discussions have always been lively and amusing, and have encouraged students to share insights and observations about themselves and each other.

EXAMPLE:

FIVE THINGS ABOUT MYSELF--ONE OF THEM IS A LIE

MAX

1. I went to a party last Saturday night.
2. Last week I couldn't come to school because I was nervous.
3. Maybe in two weeks I will go to Connecticut to see my friends.
4. Thursday evening I will have an appointment at O.I.C. about my job, printing.
5. This summer for my vacation I will go to California for one week.

JEANNE

1. I am fifty years old.
2. I don't have any husband.
3. I am through with love.
4. I don't need any man.
5. My kids are all grown up.
6. Now I am an old woman. Now I am just ready to die.

ANSWERS: LIES: Max--3., Jeanne--ALL!

WISHES AND FEARS

In one class we asked everyone to write down five wishes. When they were finished we mixed up the papers and the class tried to match the wishes with the authors. There was a surprising variety in their wishes (all the way from wishes for world peace to a wish for a new washing machine.)

At another time we asked people to write down five things that made them angry. This exercise could be used with a variety of feelings, (five things that make you happy, sad, frightened, hopeful, dreamy, etc.). This provides a good use of language to express specific feelings in an easy, circumscribed way.

EXAMPLE:

I WISH

I wish I could learn better.

I wish I had learned when I was young, it seems so hard now.

I wish the president would cut the prices of food.

I wish I could lose weight.

I wish I had a better job.

I wish I had more joy.

AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Towards the beginning of one reading class we read a newspaper article called The Passion of Winnie Lawrence by a woman from Somerville who was reminiscing about life when she was a child. The article stimulated a discussion on"the old days" and how life had changed since then. Out of that class, the students wrote down their memories of childhood. Several classes were spent writing and reading students' autobiographies. This work served to help students become more comfortable with writing and their products were something that could be shared enjoyably with each other. (One of the shorter memories also provided us with the title of our collection of student writings, The Changing of the Times.)

EXAMPLE:

THE CHANGING OF THE TIMES

I would like to say, believe it or not when we were going to school the teacher wouldn't let us talk too much about what was happening in the changing of the times. Like when the Civil Rights started real strong, they would say don't be talking about this around so many people. But I could never understand why they didn't want us to talk about it. Until now they really were afraid of the white people.

I remember our bus driver, once they burned a cross in front of his house and he had to leave town because he was helping the Civil Rights Organization.

ANN LANDERS

One of our beginning reading classes was a group of five women who enjoyed discussing problems and life issues. They were also interested in concentrating on their spelling and had asked repeatedly for dictations so that they could practice their writing. We chose a letter from the Ann Landers column, without her response. (Letters from any other advice column could also be used, i.e. Dear Abby, Ask Beth, Amy Vanderbilt, etc.) During and after the dictation, teachers and students helped each other with spelling, punctuation and grammatical corrections. Each student made a list of misspelled words. Then the students wrote their own responses to the letter, read them out loud to the class and discussed them. This process combined dictation, spelling practice, making corrections and free writing.

QUESTION BOX

After the Ann Landers exercise, we decided to create our own local advice and information resource center. We decorated and cut an opening in a cardboard box and set it up in a central location. People were encouraged to put questions in the box about anything -- information, advice, riddles, etc. (Where can I get free legal advice? Should I get married young or wait until I'm older? Who was the shortstop for the Red Sox in 1968?) Each week, the reading class would open the box, read the questions to each other and try to write answers. Often the questions required going to another source for the answer. (For instance, one student spent an hour trying to find the answer to the question about the Red Sox shortstop. She looked up several phone numbers and finally called the Globe for the answer.) When we were finished, the answers were typed up and posted next to the Question Box.

EXAMPLE:

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE QUESTION BOX

Q. How can I meet a man? (I am in my thirties.)

A. I'm looking for one too. When you find one, can you tell me?

Get a dog and take a walk along the street, you'll always get a friend.

Call 876-0324 (But don't ask for Tony.)

Q. Do you know a good cheap dentist?

A. Tufts Dental School...they are good.

Dr. Frederick Minkovitz
Highland Ave. Somerville

Q. Where can you get the best Italian food in the Boston area?

A. I don't know, I never eat Italian food out. I make it myself so I don't like to eat it out.

Q. Do you think the war in Indochina will ever stop?

A. No, only when the U.S. gets out!

No, I wish the U.S.A. would mind their own business!

Q. Where can I find free legal help?

A. Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services Inc.
390 Green Street
Cambridge, 02139
492-5520

Q. Do people in Medford all belong to the Mafia?

A. I don't think so. (We are not all Italians.)

WRITING LETTERS TO THE NEWSPAPER

One cold February day, a student in a Language Experience reading class asked where to find hockey scores in the newspaper. This question stimulated a class discussion of newspapers and the rich variety of information they contain. One student wanted to check day-time television listings; one wanted to read the horoscopes; one wanted to buy a used car.

For several class sessions, each student worked with a copy of the newspaper. We used the index to find different features and quizzed one another: "Who did the Bruins play last night?"; "What channel is 'Love of Life' on?"; "What markets are having specials this week?"

Students were particularly excited by the advice and consumer aid columns. Reading letters from angry consumers and tenants provoked a flood of similar grievances from students in the class: landlord conflicts, financial worries, health problems.

We decided to take action. Each student wrote a letter to the consumer aid column, describing his/her individual problem and asking for help. We wrote and shared these letters in class, corrected them, copied them over, and sent them to the newspaper. A week later, one student excitedly pulled a postcard out of her purse. She and several others

had received short replies which acknowledged their letters and promised action. We hope that one or two letters will soon be printed or answered in full.

By learning to use the newspaper and by writing and sending letters, students gained active control of an important printed source of information and amusement. This activity also provided the students both a supportive outlet for personal problems and a chance to use their reading and writing skills in a relevant, constructive way.

EXAMPLE:

Dear Joe:

I live on Day Street, North Cambridge. It is a one-way street. The snow plow blows a lot of the snow into my driveway. My husband and I are elderly and he has a heart condition. Sometimes it is hard to find someone to shovel the driveway for us. What can we do to stop this?

Thank you.

CROSS-CULTURAL AND CROSS-LINGUISTIC COMPARISONS

Although our reading classes are small, they often bring together students of many languages and cultures: Portuguese, Haitians, Puerto Ricans, Central and South Americans, Greeks, Japanese. Cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparisons are a favorite activity in these classes; they capitalize on students' rich diversity and range of experiences, as well as provide fascinating reading materials.

One reading class had three Haitians, two Greeks, two Americans, one Colombian, and one Portuguese. We knew each other's native country, but had never really taken advantage of our diverse backgrounds. One day before class, out of curiosity, I asked one of the Haitians what noise a rooster makes when it crows "in French". He said: "Co-co-ri-co!" and then asked what a rooster says in English. "Cock-a-doodle-doo!", I replied.

Other students came into the classroom and joined the discussion. We made a list of animals: pig, cow, horse, rooster, hen, duck, elephant, snake, etc. We then compared the noises they make in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, and English. I wrote these phonetically on the blackboard in English. We read them together and individually--an unexpectedly good and fun exercise on sounding out words. Several

students turned out to be wonderful mimics; strange grunts, squeaks, and hisses turned the classroom into an international zoo.

This experience drew us very close as a group, as we found out new things about each other. Students who were sometimes very quiet suddenly produced stentorian blasts and wild bird calls, much to everyone's delight. This group experience was a source of happy memories and was often talked about later.

I typed up the list of animal noises and we practiced reading them during the next class. Other possible subjects for oral or written cultural comparisons include: body-language--different facial expressions, gestures, noises; important holidays; folktales; significant human events--birth, coming of age, marriage, death.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND CAMERAS

We often use photographs to encourage writing. Students bring in pictures of themselves, their families and friends, interesting places they have lived or visited. Sharing these photographs often occurs spontaneously during the first or second class meeting, as we talk about ourselves and pull out treasured wallet photos.

We are looking forward to using Polaroid, instant-developing cameras in our classes next year. We hope to take pictures of ourselves, our friends, our field trips and use these in individual or group writing exercises.

(Here are some other ideas we plan to use in the future)

CARTOON CAPTIONS

The teachers and students select favorite cartoons from magazines or newspapers. Each student in the class writes his/her own caption before looking at the original. Captions are shared in class and the cartoons posted around the classroom or school. For more practice, students can also fill in the dialogue for comic strips. Both these exercises require very little writing and use humor to draw a class together.

MYTHS

The class would spend several weeks reading and discussing myths, (Greek myths, Nordic myths, Bible stories, fairy tales, American Folk Tales etc.). Students and teachers would record (in either oral or written form), folk tales that they were told as children. After the class had discussed in some depth the personal origins of myths and their relevance to people's lives, each person would try to find and record his/her own personal myth. What is the myth you live by? Is it a new and individual myth or similar to an old one? Are you St. George pursuing the dragon, the Princess on the pea, Brer Rabbit, Sleeping Beauty, etc.?

DIALOGUES WITH MYSELF

Students are asked to write down an internal dialogue between two parts of themselves. (Have your industrious self talk with the part of you that is lazy and doesn't want to come to school in the morning. Have your strong, confident self talk with the self that feels unsure and doubtful about your ability to stay in school and achieve your goals.) When these are read out loud in class, students can take different parts.

This is taken from exercises used in Gestalt Therapy. It does not have to be very personal but probably would only be used with a group of people that were comfortable with each other and had worked together for some time.

(See Gestalt Therapy Verbatim, Fritz Perls, for other variations of internal dialogues.)

STUDENT-WRITTEN BOOKS, MAGAZINES, AND NEWSPAPERS

We have compiled many of our students' writings into two books: The Changing of the Times and Sometimes I Talk with Myself. Each teacher selected short works written or dictated by her students which had general as well as personal interest. These were edited, typed on stencils, and put into cardboard binders. The first book contains writings by students in our Adult Basic Education and high school equivalency classes; the second contains writings by English-as-a-Second Language students. Because so much new material is constantly being created, both books are in their second editions.

We hope to start a student-written newspaper or newsletter soon. Each interested class will be responsible for a column or feature on a rotating basis. Some possible features include local and national news, sports, advice on consumer affairs, child-rearing, shopping, recipes, crossword puzzles, school announcements, student poems and stories. We believe the newspaper will provide a useful forum for exchanging information and an immediate outlet for sharing creative work.

For more ideas on adult new reader newspapers see:
Adult Education News produced at the Vocational and Tech-

nical Education Center, Tupelo, Mississippi, 38801.

For more ideas on student-written literary magazines see:

Chicory compiled by the Enoch Pratt Free Library Community Action Project, 606 South Ann Street, Baltimore, Maryland, 21218.

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